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RUEHML/AMEMBASSY MANILA 3118
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 9646
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4279
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RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 0874
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ISLAMABAD 000046

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: ECON EFIN EAID ETRD EAGR KPAO TBIO PK
SUBJECT: POST'S APPEAL FOR FY09 BIOTECHNOLOGY OUTREACH STRATEGY AND DEPARTMENT RESOURCES

REF: 08 STATE 129940

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Pakistan played a major role in the original Green Revolution. After several decades of lagging agricultural production, the Government of Pakistan (GOP) is looking to make the leap to join the Gene Revolution. Post has outlined an ambitious biotech program for FY 2009 and requests EEB funding of $70,000 for two proposals including a Biotech Science Fellow and a Pakistan Biotechnology Conference. Improvements in agriculture would also positively impact Pakistan's food security and fragile economy, directly benefiting USG interests in Pakistan. END SUMMARY

¶2. (SBU) Despite playing a critical role in the original Green Revolution, Pakistan has lagged behind neighbors India and China in the development and utilization of modern agricultural biotechnology. The major obstacle to the adoption of legal biotech seeds for major crops, particularly cotton, is the lack of intellectual property (IPR) protection for seed breeders. Two pieces of legislation, the Plant Breeders' Rights and Amendments to the Seed Act of 1976, have long been awaiting promulgation by Parliament. Without adequate IPR protection, no international seed company is willing to partner with Pakistan's biotech research centers to develop genetically engineered (GE) crops suitable for the local climate, existing plant pests and diseases, soil conditions including high salinity, and industry technical requirements.

¶3. (SBU) Pakistan freely imports certain bioengineered products including soybeans, soybean meal and soybean oil derived from GE soybeans. While there is no legal biotech crop planted in Pakistan, at least 60 percent of the 2008 cotton crop was illegally planted with biotech cotton varieties. The smuggled seed was developed for crop conditions in China, India and Australia, however, and has performed poorly against Pakistan's major cotton nemeses: mealy bugs and cotton curly leaf virus.

¶4. (SBU) Current biotech crops under development in Pakistan include cotton, wheat, rice, sugarcane, canola (rapeseed), tomatoes, potatoes, chilies, peppers and melons. The desired traits include virus resistance, insect resistance, salinity tolerance, drought and heat tolerance and male sterility. The U.S. is currently providing food assistance to Pakistan to address urgent short-term needs. Improvements in agriculture would not only augment Pakistan's longer-term food security, but would also give a much-needed boost to the country's ailing economy -- directly benefitting USG interests in Pakistan.

¶5. (SBU) Post's biotechnology outreach goals for FY 2009 are:

a) Assist the GOP through the U.S.-Pakistan Science and Technology Agreement in implementation of their proposed Green-to-Gene Initiative.

b) Support promulgation of sensible IPR legislation to allow collaboration between international plant breeders and Pakistan's biotech research institutes.

c) Promote scientific exchanges in the area of plant and animal genomics through the USDA endowments at the Pakistan Agricultural Research Center and agricultural universities.

d) Utilize the International Visitors Leadership Program to send Pakistani opinion leaders to the United States on a biotech farm tour.

e) Utilize the Foreign Press Center to organize a Biotech Reporting Tour for Pakistani media.

f) Invite a well-known Biotech Science Fellow for a three-month sabbatical in Islamabad to work with Pakistani policymakers, opinion leaders, scientists and educators to identity a way forward for adoption of long-overdue biotech crops in Pakistan.

g) Co-sponsor a two-day Biotechnology Workshop with a prominent local organization to address the major issues impeding development of agricultural biotechnology in Pakistan. Publish a report on papers presented at the workshop and follow-up discussion.

¶6. (SBU) EEB Biotech funds are requested for the following proposals:

a) Provide a Biotech Science Fellow for a three-month sabbatical in Islamabad.

Target audience: Pakistan's policy makers, opinion leaders, scientists, high school and university students, teachers, professors and media.

Issues to be addressed: Depending on his/her area of expertise, Post would look to the Fellow to provide leadership in identifying barriers to the promulgation of biotech IPR legislation; identify areas of scientific collaboration and potential research partnerships between Pakistani and U.S. scientists; engage in public outreach activities with high school students, universities, policy makers, opinion leaders and the media to promote the science of genetic engineering; and assist in developing a framework for and participate in the Pakistan Biotechnology Workshop.

Policy objectives: Assist the GOP in removing barriers to passage of IPR legislation for plant breeders which would allow for U.S.-Pakistan collaboration in seed development; promote a positive image of biotech crops which has been tarnished as a result of illegal biotech cotton plantings; through public outreach and media events explain to laymen how biotechnology can help Pakistan meet their future food security needs as well as develop superior cotton varieties, thus improving the livelihoods of future generations; identify areas for scientific collaboration including Biofuels crop development.

Estimated cost: One Science Fellow for 3 months: $51,000

Proposed length of program: 3 months

b) Co-sponsor a 2-day Biotechnology Conference/Workshop. U.S. speakers would include the Science Fellow and one additional U.S. biotech leader. Most papers presented would be from Pakistani biotech leaders in the field of research, policy and education. A conference report would be published with presented papers and follow-up discussions.

Target audience: Pakistan's policy makers, opinion leaders,

scientists and media.

Issues to be addressed: Implementation of Pakistan's Green to Gene Initiative; IPR barriers to propagation of biotech crops; highlights of current biotech research in Pakistan including the race to develop crops resistant to identified pests and diseases; biotech and food security; biotech Biofuels; areas for U.S.-Pakistan scientific collaboration.

Policy objectives: Identify the barriers to legal adoption of biotechnology in Pakistan's agricultural economy and steps needed to begin the proposed Gene Revolution; identify how biotech can assist in meeting Pakistan's food security needs including on-going research in wheat stem rust and other looming plant and pest threats; identify challenges in developing biotech crops for the Biofuels industry; and identify potential U.S.-Pakistan scientific collaboration under the U.S.-Pakistan Science and Technology Agreement.

Estimated cost: $19,000
Additional U.S. participant: $16,000 for two weeks
Conference room: $2,000
Publication: $1,000

Proposed length of program: 2 days

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¶7. (SBU) Post hopes that EEB will look favorably upon this request for funding to assist the Government of Pakistan in their efforts to

make the jump from the Green Revolution to the Gene Revolution, and to once again become a world leader in agricultural science.